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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000067

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SUBJECT: CFC-A COMMANDER DISCUSSES THE WAY FORWARD IN
AFGHANISTAN WITH CZECH DEPUTY FM

REF: STATE 7434

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor
Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Visiting Prague, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) Commander General Karl Eikenberry briefed Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar on January 22nd. In a wide ranging and positive conversation on Afghanistan they discussed contributions, the current situation, and future opportunities. Pojar reiterated the Czech commitment to continue to field assets in support of Afghanistan, focusing on an upcoming military hospital deployment, the establishment of a Czech-led PRT 2008, and a donation of 12-14 helicopters after refurbishment. The Czechs also said they have now lifted one of their ISAF force deployment caveats. End summary.

¶2. (C) CFC-A Commander Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry met with Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar on January 22 to discuss the way forward in Afghanistan. Eikenberry praised the Czech Republic for making an "outstanding" contribution relative to its size, and thanked Pojar for the Czechs' provision airforce airfield management personnel, deminers, medical assets, special forces and generous equipment and ammunition donations to Afghanistan. Eikenberry said the Taliban must be concerned that time is against them as the Afghan leadership in Kabul builds in confidence, and social services continue to find their way to an increasing proportion of the population. Eikenberry highlighted the growing capabilities of the Afghan National Army (ANA), showing that the multi-year investment in proper training is beginning to pay dividends. He said the completion of NATO expansion in Afghanistan, and the fact that ISAF contributing countries were firmly on the ground despite casualties could make the Taliban increasingly uncomfortable with the long term outlook.

¶3. (C) Eikenberry said the Spring would bring renewed violence and 2007 could be a decisive year. Taliban would again hit hard, but were unlikely to be able to do so in as coordinated a manner as in 2006 (a distinction, he said, that will be lost on the media when the offensive comes). Eikenberry said it is foreseeable that NATO and the ANA could benefit from additional U.S. bridging forces and additional resources where necessary. Improved cooperation with Pakistan would also be a key factor.

¶4. (C) Turning to needs, Eikenberry said the U.S. will set a good example at the January 26 NATO Foreign Ministerial in Brussels by coming to the table with significant additional commitments. He hoped that the planned Czech deployment of a

military hospital to Kabul would include capacity-building work with the medical arm of the Afghan Ministry of Defense, as this would contribute to the overall growth of the ANA. He welcomed the Czech intention to take over from the Hungarian PRT at Pol-e-Khomri, and agreed with the Czechs that a longer term commitment would allow the PRT to build effective links with the local community. Eikenberry highlighted the need for an adequate civilian component with discretionary spending ability to quickly initiate projects that would resonate with the local population. He thought the Czech plan to phase-in civilian personnel to the Hungarian PRT in 2007 would be a good way of ensuring continuity when the handover came at the end of 2008.

¶5. (C) Eikenberry also shared his belief that NATO operations in Afghanistan provided excellent transformative impetus for the militaries of contributing nations. Military officers are gaining crucial experience in Afghanistan and the professional relationships developing between individuals of different contributing countries would have benefits for the future.

¶6. (C) Pojar thanked Eikenberry for his assessment, saying that a contribution of 12-14 Russian-manufactured helicopters would also be donated after refurbishment at NATO expense. Eikenberry said he was aware of this development and said that some questions remained about that process. He said that he hoped the Czech donation works out, noting that a final qualitative review remained to be done, assessing costs and renovation. Pojar said the Czechs have already approached the Russians about obtaining the appropriate end-user authorization to send the Russian-origin equipment to Kabul, noting that negotiations with Moscow on the issue would inevitably involve some friction. He felt confident that the

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Czechs would successfully obtain the necessary Russian approval. Pojar also raised a Czech donation of 20,000 Czech-made assault rifles and 650 rifles, a development that would finally leave cold war stockpiles empty.

¶7. (C) Pojar noted that the Czech Government is eager to learn from the expertise of ISAF contributors in fielding PRTs. Consultations with several allies are already underway, and a Czech planner is now embedded with the German PRT at Feyzabad. Eikenberry encouraged Pojar to continue this effort, also noting that there are NATO and U.S. PRT commander training courses that might offer much useful information.

¶8. (C) On caveats for ISAF forces, Czech Security Policy Director Veronika Smigolova said that one of the two Czech caveats (regarding the area of deployment for Czech troops at Kabul airport) had recently been lifted. She said that a second caveat, preventing Czech deminers from dealing with chemical rounds, would be dealt with in the next rotation by providing troops capable of dealing with chemical weapons.
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